Characters

- Aiko, a Japanese girl, 12
- Okaasan, her mother, also The Grand Mistress of Matsuyama
- Otoosan, her father
- Tooriko, her sister, 16
- Yukiko Obasan, her aunt
- The Kokeshi Dolls
- Kuro-Ko

TIME AND PLACE

Matsuyama, Japan. The late 1600s.

With thanks to Brian Nelson, June Angela, Pamela Sterling, Andrew Bager at Lincoln Center Institute, the Kennedy Center's New Vision/New Voices Program, Honolulu Theatre for Youth and Kuma Kahua.

Prologue

Koto music. A Kuro-Ko, a traditional Japanese theater stage assistant, dances about the stage setting props and assumes the waki position at the side of the stage.

Scene 1

SCENE ONE

Aiko and Tooriko's bedroom. Feminine and girlish. Aiko, her long black hair in pigtails, sits on a colorful futon, folding origami paper. Okaasan enters with a tray of tea, musubi and fruit. Aiko bows her head towards her mother. Their love for one another is apparent. Okaasan peels the fruit and they share the refreshment.

AIKO

Will it be today, Okaasan? You said it would be yesterday.

OKAASAN

The horses tire easily in the snow. Otoosan did not expect snow.

AIKO

The horses may tire, but not Father.

OKAASAN

Maybe not, but he never does well with the unexpected.

AIKO

I hope he brings me a pretty kokeshi doll.

OKAASAN

The kokeshi are for decoration. I make you soft dolls for play.

AIKO

But I like the kokeshi; they are so colorful and beautiful.

OKAASAN

Everything you do seems to fly in the face of tradition. Anyway, perhaps the time for dolls is over.

AIKO

(Surprised.)

Why?

OKAASAN

Father thinks you are too old for dolls.

AIKO

Oneesan is too old for dolls, but not I. I want to keep my dolls forever. They are my playmates.

OKAASAN

Your sister is your playmate.

AIKO

Oneesan is too old. She has forgotten how to play.

OKAASAN

I hope you never forget how to play.

AIKO

Forget? I shall never stop playing.

OKAASAN

One day, all women must stop. But, in your heart, you must remember.

AIKO

Okaasan, why must all things be the same for all females? What if one of us is different?

OKAASAN

And just who is this different one? Could it be Aiko the great child empress, protector of our rice fields and

persimmon orchard?

AIKO

Yes! Aiko the adventuress! My dolls are my court! We will frolic, drink tea, and never live in anyone's shadow!

OKAASAN

And what about a husband, honorable adventuress?

AIKO

No-no-never-never-no! That would interfere with tea and sweets!

OKAASAN

(Laughs.)

Oh, Aiko-chan, then the world would be turned around and upside down!

AIKO

Then maybe I belong in a topsy turvy world!

OKAASAN

(A sigh as she playfully touches Aiko's braids.)

Dear Aiko-chan, it is hard to imagine you all grown up, married, with children of your own.

AIKO

I only grew one inch in the last three years, so I shall be a girl forever.

OKAASAN

When you become a lady, Otoosan will take away your dolls and bring a handsome suitor who will take you for his bride.

AIKO

When does it start, this questionable condition of being a lady?

OKAASAN

It starts in the body.

AIKO

Yes?

OKAASAN

(Hesitant.)

Here.

(Points to her abdomen.)

AIKO

What starts?

OKAASAN

Well...your body will...prepare itself for children. You may feel frightened or sad. You will...bleed and —

AIKO

Bleed? Is someone going to cut me?

OKAASAN

It is a...cleansing.

AIKO

But I am not dirty!

OKAASAN

A *purification.* And then you are a woman and you must prepare yourself for all that means.

AIKO

And when does this stop, this war in my body?

OKAASAN

When the sun goes down on the last battle.

AIKO

I shall pray not to grow even another fraction of an inch!

OKAASAN

Even Issunboshi, the little one-inch man, wanted to grow.

AIKO

I will trade places with him. Put me in a chestnut shell with a pearl for my pillow and a petal for my blanket.

OKAASAN

Oh, Aiko-chan, you live in fairy tales.

AIKO

Not today...

OKAASAN

Dear child. Do not think of it as war; think of it as power.

AIKO

What victory is there in bleeding to death?

OKAASAN

This is bleeding *to life.* It gives you the power to have children; it is a sign of your fertility.

AIKO

Does Otoosan think I am bleeding? Is that why he does not wish for me to have any more dolls?

OKAASAN

He knows the time is coming when his last little girl changes forever.

(A beat.)

Shall I tell you a secret?

AIKO

Oh yes!

OKAASAN

These dolls of yours were once my dolls.

AIKO

But why did your father never take them away?

OKAASAN

They sat on the table looking beautiful. At night, I slipped them into my kimono and played with them in bed. When he caught me, I said I wanted to save them for the daughters I would someday have. After you and Tooriko came, however, I lost interest in dolls.

AIKO

How is that possible?

OKAASAN

(A smile.)

It is a mystery.

AIKO

I never will.

OKAASAN

Time will tell. Your choices may change.

AIKO

And if they do not?

OKAASAN

Then I guess we will have to change the world, find a place for an adventuress to fit!

AIKO

But what would Father say?

OKAASAN

He would curse the day that *my* father taught me to read and write!

AIKO

And then you taught me!

OKAASAN

I will always teach you, for I grew you inside of me like a flower. Come to me with every fear you have, no matter how small, ne, Aiko-chan?

AIKO

Can you make the war stop?

OKAASAN

(A gentle laugh.)

You expect incredible magic, little one. Think of it as the discovery of something very precious inside of you.

AIKO

You mean like a buried treasure?

OKAASAN

If you like.

AIKO

War, blood, buried treasure. It sounds like something for boys!

OKAASAN

It is exclusively for girls. Your older sister is bleeding.

AIKO

(A shriek.)

Oneesan? Honto?

(Looks around.)

Where?

OKAASAN

...privately...

AIKO

But she never cries out in pain.

OKAASAN

Maybe it is something that she welcomes.

AIKO

If she were nicer, she would not bleed.

OKAASAN

Your sister bleeds once a month.

AIKO

Once a month? But that is so often!

OKAASAN

It keeps a woman honest.

AIKO

Then men must bleed, too, so there will always be truth.

OKAASAN

Men do bleed.

AIKO

Once a month?

OKAASAN

Perhaps not often enough.

(A beat.)

But always in love and war.

AIKO

So I want neither love nor war.

(A beat.)

Okaasan, will Tooriko make babies now?

OKAASAN

Give her time, my child. She has only been married one season.

AIKO

Does she know how to make a baby?

OKAASAN

What do you mean?

AIKO

Does she know the recipe?

OKAASAN

(Looks away to hide her amusement.)

Oh, I am certain she has learned it by now.

(Enter Tooriko with a basket of sewing. Her seriousness and formality are stark contrasts to Aiko's exuberance.)

TOORIKO

Good evening, Okaasan.

(To Aiko.)

Aiko, I heard you all the way down the corridor talking as loud as a boy. Let me tell you something, little sister, you have no choice. Life is love and war and that is all. Here.

(Hands her a sewing basket.)

Make yourself useful. Sew.

(Pinches Aiko.)

And never you mind about whether or not I shall have children! My husband is so busy cutting lumber in the mountains that I may as well not worry about it either.

(Aiko ignores the offering of sewing and Tooriko gives her a reproachful glance.)

TOORIKO

Sew and improve your domestic skills!

AIKO

Ane, I do not wish to sew this evening! Otoosan will be home any moment and he is bringing me a new doll.

TOORIKO

Your embroidery work is less than perfect. When the childhood fat wears off your fingers, perhaps they will be more dexterous.

AIKO

My fingers are not fat! Yours are too skinny, like chopsticks. Chopstick-Fingers-Oneesan!

TOORIKO

(Thrusts basket at Aiko again.)

Here is your sewing for today. Take it. Mother. Make her take it.

(Sighs deeply.)

I thought I was rid of this little ladybug when I married, but I am stuck here more often than I like waiting for my husband — and waiting on this spoiled child.

AIKO

Dear, sweet sister.

(Okaasan takes it and hands it to Aiko who accepts it graciously, which irritates Tooriko.)

OKAASAN

Aiko-chan, let us embroider flowers.

TOORIKO

Embroider lilies. Be precise. Make it a present for Aunt Yukiko.

AIKO

I do not wish to sew for our grumpy old aunt.

OKAASAN

Aiko-chan! Do not speak that way of Obasan!

AIKO

She always unbraids my pigtails!

TOORIKO

Because they make you look like a little girl.

AIKO

I *am* a little girl!

TOORIKO

You must start behaving your age.

AIKO

I will not act old like you.

TOORIKO

I am not old!

AIKO

You are cursed with bleeding, so you are old!

TOORIKO

(Surprised.)

How do you know about that? Did you watch me changing my clothing, you nuisance?

AIKO

I just know, that is all.

TOORIKO

Be still and sew.

OKAASAN

I told Aiko-chan about the menses.

TOORIKO

She is too young to understand.

AIKO

Is that so? But you just said that I am a lady!

TOORIKO

I take it back. You are a...

(Tries to think of a word.)

...you are a little azuki bean.

AIKO

(Laughs.)

If I am a little bean, then you are a big bean!

OKAASAN

Aiko-chan, enough.

AIKO

Marriage has made sister a weed. Perhaps that is what I shall embroider. Any suggestions, dear sister?

TOORIKO

Yes. Embroider your lips together.

OKAASAN

Girls, please.

TOORIKO

This...this condition of women is not for your amusement — or mine. Or anyone else's.

AIKO

I am sorry.

TOORIKO

Very well.

AIKO

Tell me, Oneesan, does it hurt when you bleed?

TOORIKO

Ladies do not discuss such things.

AIKO

Do tell!

TOORIKO

(Wanting to terrify her.)

If you must know, it hurts like ten horses trampling on your stomach, like the high winds of a typhoon twisting, grinding through your gut.

AIKO

Oh my goodness!

TOORIKO

It is the beginning of life; you will see. It starts and secrets unfold.

AIKO

Secrets? What secrets?

TOORIKO

Woman secrets!

AIKO

Like what!

OKAASAN

Do not tease little Aiko so, Tooriko-san.

TOORIKO

Like playing games with your husband.

AIKO

Grown-up men play games with women?

TOORIKO

Oh yes.

OKAASAN

Tooriko!

AIKO

How odd. What kinds of games?

OKAASAN

That is enough.

TOORIKO

But you, with all your spice, will never know the power of it. You will sit here and merely bleed and whine and your suitors will run away in the snow looking for more domestically suitable mates.

OKAASAN

Tooriko, are you talking about the acquisition of a pet or wife.

AIKO

Can Father stop the pain of trampling horses?

TOORIKO

(Laughs.)

Otoosan? He can do nothing in this matter but look the other way when the condition begins.

OKAASAN

In fact, your father will suddenly become speechless.

AIKO

Father? But why? He is a strong man.

OKAASAN

Because his little girl becomes a woman. Is it not true, Tooriko, that your father never knows what to say to you anymore?

TOORIKO

He found such a nice husband for me.

OKAASAN

But does he speak?

TOORIKO

Only when necessary.

OKAASAN

But, then again, when my condition began, my father talked incessantly about anything *but* my condition. I was always still his flower. Tooriko-chan. You also must be a flower.

TOORIKO

Be rebellious while you can, Aiko-chan. One day your petals will be heavy.

AIKO

Then I shall shed them and bloom anew, looking up at the sun.

OKAASAN

The worlds of love and marriage demand much of us, Aiko-chan.

AIKO

Are you happy, Okaasan?

OKAASAN

Without question

AIKO

So you will not tell me to bend to the ground blind to the sun, will you?

OKAASAN

Never, but neither should you make time stand still.

AIKO

Even though your father is dead, are you not still a flower, Okaasan?

OKAASAN

Sometimes in the morning when I wake up from dreams, I feel like my father's daughter. Then I look around me and realize that I am now my husband's wife and my children's mother.

AIKO

Now I *know* I do not wish to grow up. What a somber business!

OKAASAN

Not at all. Without this "business," I would not have you or Tooriko.

AIKO

But there is no time to play! Tooriko-san, I will have to keep you from being a willow tree, weeping for eternity.

TOORIKO

I will not weep! I will stand erect like a pine. I will see over the mountains.

AIKO

Pining pine tree! Pining, pining pine tree!

TOORIKO

Oh the joys of having a little monkey sister!

AIKO

Thank you, big monkey sister!

OKAASAN

(Breaking them up.)

Girls, girls, please. Maybe you are not deserving of presents from your father's travels.

AIKO

Gentle mother. How you tease us! If there were not dolls in Father's satchel, I would look at you and say you, after all, are the best gift.

TOORIKO

Enough, enough.

OKAASAN

Oh, let her be a child, Tooriko-san. Enjoy her.

TOORIKO

Of course. Tell me when you start to bleed, sister, and I might tell you about the power.

AIKO

Power?

OKAASAN

Tooriko!

TOORIKO

Oh yes. You will gain a power greater than the greatest magic.

AIKO

You lie! You just want to trick me, put me at ease so the trampling of horses will be that much more shocking.

OKAASAN

My little warriors. I hope your father brings you shields and swords so that your battles can be fought to a proper and deserving finish.

TOORIKO

What will Father bring us? Did he give you any idea, Okaasan?

AIKO

I hope he brings me a tall kokeshi doll with painted red lips and beautiful blackened teeth!

TOORIKO

I would like a lacquer comb with polished abalone shell.

(Okaasan has wandered to a window and stares outward into the night.)

AIKO

What would you like, Okaasan?

OKAASAN

(Distracted.)

What?

AIKO

What would you like Father to bring for you?

OKAASAN

(Concerned.)

Just him.

(Looks out of the window again.)

There is so much snow.

AIKO

He will find his way safely. I will pray for him and he shall come.

OKAASAN

He should be within the limits of town by midnight. Perhaps I should go looking for him.

TOORIKO

It is too cold for women to go outside.

AIKO

Sometimes rules have to be broken.

OKAASAN

As a child, I went into the snow when my mother said to stay by the fire. And I stayed by the fire when my mother bade me to get some fresh air.

TOORIKO

I stayed by the fire when you told me.

OKAASAN

Yes.

AIKO

I did not!

OKAASAN

That is so.

(Becomes distracted by the snow again.)

Has the snow stopped yet?

TOORIKO

(Looks out of window.)

No. It is falling, falling as if it will fall forever.

(Lights crossfade to Scene Two...)

Scene 2

SCENE TWO

A low light fades in on the bedroom. Aiko sleeps restlessly. Tooriko sits up anxiously. There is a large candle. Aiko stirs and Tooriko tries to hide her anxiety.

TOORIKO

Go back to sleep.

AIKO

Oneesan?

TOORIKO

What now?

AIKO

...Tell me about the power.

TOORIKO

No. There is no power, only the suffering.

AIKO

I knew you were fibbing today!

TOORIKO

All right, you want to know about the power? Fine, I will tell you since you will probably never get a chance to use it on someone.

(Aiko leans forward with anticipation.)

TOORIKO

If you even hint at the fact that you are having your monthly bleeding, your husband will bring you sweets and have the maid cook your favorite foods.

AIKO

Truly?

TOORIKO

If you want time alone to dream, you hint again and he suddenly must leave the room. If you say that the bleeding is very heavy, he will not even want to sup with you or share the bed with you.

AIKO

Truly? Then I could play all night.

TOORIKO

Yes. I have never known such peace.

(Tooriko looks out of the window, nervously picks up her sewing, and starts to work on a piece of embroidery.)

AIKO

Why must you sew at twilight?

TOORIKO

Because there is too much snow.

AIKO

Let it snow now that Father is home. Did he bring gifts? Did you see him before you fell asleep?

(Tooriko glances at her and then looks away quickly.)

TOORIKO

Here. Sew to keep your mind off our troubles.

AIKO

What troubles?

TOORIKO

Nothing. There are no troubles.

AIKO

Father still has not returned home?

TOORIKO

You told Okaasan that rules sometimes have to be broken! She took the horse and rode into town to check on Father's traveling party.

AIKO

What? How long ago?

TOORIKO

Several hours.

AIKO

I shall go find her!

(Aiko tries to leave and Tooriko stops her.)

TOORIKO

A lady waits.

AIKO

I ride just as well as Father. Let me go!

TOORIKO

Not a man in Ehime prefecture will have you as a wife if you keep acting like this.

AIKO

Good riddance. I will wait for a man who will allow me to think.

TOORIKO

Then you will be waiting for a long, long time.

AIKO

Go to sleep, sister.

TOORIKO

No, Aiko, you cannot go.

(They struggle as sounds of horses are heard from offstage. Aiko tries to run out, but is stopped by Otoosan who enters covered with snow. He conceals grimness with a smile for his children. He carries a satchel filled to capacity.)

OTOOSAN

Good daughters. Hello.

TOORIKO

(Bows low.)

Welcome home, Otoosan.

AIKO

Welcome, Father.

OTOOSAN

Where are you going in such a hurry, Aiko?

TOORIKO

She was going out in the snow to find you!

AIKO

Where is mother?

OTOOSAN

It is so cold.

AIKO

Otoosan, where is she? With the horses?

TOORIKO

Quiet, Aiko!

(He sits fighting emotion as Tooriko helps him off with his coat. He and Tooriko sit around the candle. Incredulous, Aiko puts on her father's coat and prepares to leave.)

OTOOSAN

Take off my coat and sit, Aiko.

AIKO

Tell me where she is, when she will be here.

OTOOSAN

Sit.

(Otoosan takes the coat off of her and forces her to sit by the candle.)

OTOOSAN

Children, your mother has...left us.

AIKO

What? Where has she gone?

OTOOSAN

...there has been...an accident.

(The breath is knocked out of Aiko. She sits motionlessly. Tooriko is quiet with shock for a moment and then she weeps uncontrollably.)

AIKO

(With an eerie calmness.)

You must tell me what has happened to my mother.

OTOOSAN

...we will not see her again.

AIKO

What have you done to her?

TOORIKO

Aiko! Please. What has happened, Otoosan?

OTOOSAN

It is not for women to hear such things.

AIKO

I will hear everything if you say I shall never see my mother again. Tell me.

OTOOSAN

The snow. An accident with the horses. Her head struck a rock. When they found her, she was already —

TOORIKO

Say no more.

AIKO

Speak!

OTOOSAN

Too late, too late.

AIKO

Is that all you have to say?

TOORIKO

Silence, Aiko!

OTOOSAN

It is not for men to weep and curse fate.

AIKO

What then? To sit there like a piece of stone?

TOORIKO

Aiko!

OTOOSAN

Yes.

AIKO

How can you? What are you?

OTOOSAN

The bearer of our pain so that you can go on.

(Looks downward.)

AIKO

(Dazed.)

Was there a lot of blood?

OTOOSAN

(Surprised by the question.)

Yes.

AIKO

(Quietly.)

Women have lots of blood.

OTOOSAN

Yes.

AIKO

Were there horses trampling and high winds blowing?

OTOOSAN

(Surprised again.)

Yes, Aiko.

TOORIKO

After she struck her head, perhaps there was no pain, just quiet...

OTOOSAN

...very quiet...

(The three sit quietly as Tooriko tries to suppress tears. Otoosan tries to suppress them as well. Aiko is surprised by this show of emotion; Tooriko is disturbed by it.)

TOORIKO

Oh, this family. Pull yourself together, Father.

OTOOSAN

Your mother drifts in the wind tonight, seeking her next existence. We must keep the sky clear; we must not weep.

AIKO

Bring her back.

(To the ether.)

Come back, Okaasan. Come back!

OTOOSAN

Enough, gentle Aiko-chan....we must go on as usual...

AIKO

How?

TOORIKO

Shall we sit around like fools and weep?

AIKO

You never loved her like I did.

TOORIKO

I am older and I have loved her longer.

(A beat.)

It is not our way to weep.

AIKO

Is it not equally as foolish to pretend that nothing has happened?

(Otoosan calms himself and reaches for the satchel. He takes out two packages.)

OTOOSAN

Here. Your gifts. Come. Let us be as curious and happy as we always are when I return from my journeys.

AIKO

I want no gift, only the return of my mother.

OTOOSAN

What do you think I brought you, Aiko-chan?

AIKO

Who will I ask for help when I am learning new embroidery?

TOORIKO

I will help you.

AIKO

You do not help. You order.

OTOOSAN

We will all help each other.

AIKO

Tooriko-san will only help herself and her husband.

TOORIKO

What is wrong with that? If you ever grow up, you will bring a husband to live here with you and Otoosan. You will know secrets that will make you selfish sometimes, too.

OTOOSAN

Yes, Aiko. I will find you a strong, patient man.

TOORIKO

In this case, perhaps a saint is required.

OTOOSAN

And Tooriko will always be near. Her husband plans to build their new house just on the other side of the village.

AIKO

It might as well be on the other side of the universe.

TOORIKO

Otoosan, she is topsy-turvy. I walk a straight and level path.

OTOOSAN

When I am gone, you two sisters will be all that is left of our family. Can you not be civil to one another? Come, Aiko-chan. Come sit by me.

AIKO

Who will cook tonight, Otoosan?

TOORIKO

I will cook.

AIKO

You? The taste will kill us all!

OTOOSAN

I have sent word to your aunt and she will come tomorrow to help us.

AIKO

Aunt Yukiko!

OTOOSAN

This is a time to find strength in family. Yukiko Obasan is good and kind.

AIKO

And as rough as a tree trunk.

TOORIKO

But as sturdy and lasting.

OTOOSAN

Are you not curious about your present, Aiko? Perhaps it will give you a little light in this darkness?

AIKO

(She is.)

Not really. Not now.

OTOOSAN

Please, Aiko.

AIKO

Never mind.

OTOOSAN

Then if I have brought a new doll, must I find another little girl to give it to?

AIKO

Otoosan? What is death like? Could the gods have made a mistake? Can they be persuaded to give her back?

OTOOSAN

Open your present, dear child.

AIKO

She said she would be here.

TOORIKO

Stop it, Aiko-chan.

AIKO

How can I behold these gifts at such a time?

TOORIKO

Because we need to. If I stare at the tatami all night and cry, then I will not make it to morning.

OTOOSAN

Here, Tooriko-san.

(He hands her a gift. She opens it. It is a scarf.)

TOORIKO

Thank you, Otoosan. I shall save it.

OTOOSAN

Do not save it. Wear it. Make yourself look beautiful. Today. Now. And for you, Aiko-chan.

(He takes out a silver, sparkling box. Immediately, the Kuro-ko tinkles wind chimes and Aiko looks around, startled as if she hears something. Aiko holds the box and slowly opens it, scattering dust. She takes out a large silver and gold lacquered mirror with angel hair hanging in shreds from it. It leaves her in a state of

awe. Tooriko is afraid of it.)

AIKO

What is it, Father?

OTOOSAN

It is called a "mirror."

AIKO

"...mirror..."

TOORIKO

I have never heard of such a thing. Does it belong in the house?

OTOOSAN

It is magic. Look in the glass.

(Aiko does and is startled.)

AIKO

There is a girl in the glass!

OTOOSAN

(Laughs.)

And who does she look like?

(Aiko dares look again. She gasps. Tooriko is curious, but is controlled by her fear.)

AIKO

It is Mother, when she was a young girl!

(Tooriko screams in fright and Otoosan silences her with a gentle look.)

OTOOSAN

It is you, Aiko-chan.

AIKO

(Looks again.)

She looks like Okaasan.

OTOOSAN

(Sadly.)

Yes. A young lady.

AIKO

Her eyes are so black. Okaasan has become a child in this mirror. How can that be so? What have you done? Have you put mother in the mirror? Can I get her out?

TOORIKO

No! No! We will all be cursed.

OTOOSAN

Whenever you miss your mother, you must look in this mirror and you will find her looking back at you.

AIKO

...magic...mother...

(A warm, loving woman's laughter is heard only by Aiko who jumps in surprise and fear.)

TOORIKO

(Staring at her.)

You are possessed.

AIKO

That is not me in the mirror! It is a spirit.

OTOOSAN

It is you and you are the best memory of your mother. No one else in Matsuyama has such a mirror. You will be the talk of the town.

TOORIKO

And not just because of this mirror.

(Aiko brandishes the mirror towards her sister who jumps in fright.)

TOORIKO

Keep that thing away from me!

(Otoosan laughs, but Tooriko begins to cry again.)

AIKO

Come, look in the mirror, sister! It truly is Mother!

TOORIKO

No!

AIKO

See something above and beyond your straight and level path. Just this once.

TOORIKO

No! Please!

AIKO

Very well then. I shall keep the secrets of the mirror.

TOORIKO

Have them!

AIKO

The mirror will lead me to Okaasan.

TOORIKO

I will have nothing to do with such black magic.

OTOOSAN

It is healing magic.

TOORIKO

I will have tea instead.

OTOOSAN

I brought your mother a porcelain doll.

(He offers it to Tooriko, but she motions for him to offer it to Aiko. He hands it to Aiko. Her pleasure gives Tooriko pleasure.)

OTOOSAN

For you, Aiko-chan.

(Aiko takes it.)

AIKO

Thank you, Otoosan.

TOORIKO

Thank you.

OTOOSAN

I wish that I could have brought back more... I wish...

(He picks up his things and leaves. Tooriko tries to blow out the candle and Aiko stops her.)

AIKO

Leave it be.

TOORIKO

But it is almost burned away. There is no use for it.

AIKO

Let it burn and, when it is gone, I want its scent to linger in my hair and kimono.

TOORIKO

(Urging her.)

You must stop dreaming, little sister. Learn to be practical. As you can see, our parents are not immortal.

AIKO

But they are. Mother lives.

TOORIKO

Aiko-chan, childhood is a butterfly feeding on the dew of youth. And the dew disappears quickly. You *must* grow up.

AIKO

No. I must wait for Mother.

TOORIKO

Oh, how can you behave so when she has died this night?

AIKO

She is only hiding.

TOORIKO

And you have been struck by the moon. Do you not see that the gods have punished her for riding out into the snow like a soldier?

AIKO

She *is* a soldier, a soldier of the soul, like me! I shall ride, too, and I will return in one piece with Mother at my side.

TOORIKO

Dear Aiko.

AIKO

She is somewhere and I shall find her.

TOORIKO

(Sighs.)

Maybe in another life.

AIKO

No! In this one!

(Tooriko leaves. Aiko stares into the mirror as the Kuro-ko tinkles the wind chimes. Lights crossfade to Scene Three...)

Scene 3

SCENE THREE

Lights fade in on the bedroom. Yukiko Obasan cleans the room with an obsessive efficiency. When she begins to dust, she sees Aiko's collection of kokeshi dolls and sighs in disgust. Aiko tiptoes into the room and Yukiko whirls around with a sixth sense.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Why are you sneaking in here?

AIKO

I did not wish to disturb you, Obasan.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Come here. Now.

AIKO

No, thank you.

YUKIKO OBASAN

How my sister let you run around in those pigtails at your age is beyond me.

(Yukiko Obasan tries to unbraid Aiko's pigtails as Aiko fidgets.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

Stop wiggling like a snake.

(Aiko leaps from her aunt's arms.)

AIKO

Are you so familiar with snakes?

YUKIKO OBASAN

It is time to be rid of your dolls as well.

AIKO

You cannot take away my toys!

YUKIKO OBASAN

Now that I am running this household for your father, it is time you acted your age.

AIKO

You sleep in my mother's bed!

YUKIKO OBASAN

(Embarrassed.)

Where else am I to sleep? In the stables with the horses?

AIKO

I am certain that could be arranged.

YUKIKO OBASAN

A mother dies, her sister comes to help. Good because we share the same blood.

AIKO

Blood?

YUKIKO OBASAN

As custom has it, I must help.

AIKO

By marrying your sister's husband?

YUKIKO OBASAN

Look at you, so unlady-like. Come here and sit down so that I may loosen your hair from this most inappropriate style.

AIKO

This is my hair, wild and free. I shall never do what you say. You came here with food to make my father stop being sad. Now you sleep in my mother's bed. She will come back and you will be chased out in the middle

of the night!

YUKIKO OBASAN

And will you stay here all alone when your father must travel to market? How will a child fend for herself?

AIKO

I am an adventuress.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Is that so? What if goblins and ogres come?

AIKO

I will think them to death!

(A beat.)

Besides, I will not be alone. I will be here with my mother and my mirror.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Your what? "Mirror"?

AIKO

Never you mind. It is a special gift from my father that is none of *your* business.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Aiko-chan... I am your...new mother.

AIKO

No, thank you.

YUKIKO OBASAN

I will cook for you and help you with your sewing. And, like my sister, I can read and write. I will help you with those lessons as well.

AIKO

(Fidgeting.)

No, thank you.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Be still.

AIKO

No!

(Aiko tries to leave the room and her aunt stops her.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

I said sit! I will teach you civility if it is the last thing I do.

(Aiko fights, tears falling, and Yukiko Obasan forces her to sit while she undoes Aiko's ponytail. Aiko cries.)

AIKO

You smell like onions.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Thank you, dear child.

AIKO

Or like soggy squid that has sat in the sun for days.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Bless you, sweet princess.

AIKO

And I also detect a strong odor of fermented soy beans.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Healthy foods for the body.

AIKO

Why do you cook so much food for my father.

YUKIKO OBASAN

For all of you, to help you forget.

AIKO

I forget nothing.

YUKIKO OBASAN

May I prepare something special for you? Is there something that you would like?

AIKO

Yes. Mongolian bamboo shoots.

YUKIKO OBASAN

I would have to go to Mongolia for that.

AIKO

(That's her point; with malevolent delight.)

Yes.

(Yukiko Obasan finishes unbraiding her ponytail.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

There. Now see how beautiful you look. The young men of Matsuyama will stand in line to have the hand of a lady like you.

(Yukiko Obasan opens Aiko's mouth and examines her teeth.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

And you have perfect teeth as well.

AIKO

That is what father says when he buys a new horse.

(Yukiko Obasan tries to manage the strain as she puts the kokeshi dolls into a furoshiki and ties it up.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

Now I want you to show me that you are willing to cooperate. Take these dolls to the attic.

(Aiko opens the furoshiki and studies her dolls with love.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

They are just things. Little girl things.

(Aiko slips her mirror out of her kimono sleeve, stares into it as wind chimes tinkle. Startled, Yukiko Obasan looks around.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

Did you just hear something?

(Aiko puts the mirror away.)

AIKO

Okaasan says I may keep my dolls.

YUKIKO OBASAN

What is that you are hiding in your sleeve?

AIKO

Just a thing.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Let me see it.

AIKO

I think not.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Your mother is gone now.

(Gently.)

She can speak no more.

AIKO

You cannot silence a true mother.

(At her wit's end, Yukiko Obasan returns the dolls to the furoshiki.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

If you do not put these away, I will use them in the cooking fire tonight.

AIKO

I hate you! You are a thief!

(Aiko takes the package and leaves angrily. Yukiko feels tormented and inept. Lights crossfade from downstage right. An open road. Aiko wears a scarf around her head and a jacket. She carries two furoshiki. She sits looking from right to left. Tooriko appears also dressed warmly. She is surprised to find her sister.)

TOORIKO

What are you doing on the outer roadway?

AIKO

I am going to town.

TOORIKO

By yourself? Come back to the house this instant.

AIKO

I am a young lady, am I not? I may travel the world alone.

TOORIKO

Silly Aiko-chan. You will get sick in this chill.

AIKO

Mother leaves and now you leave. I am left to live with our aunt and father. Yukiko Obasan is pretending to be our mother.

TOORIKO

She is only trying to help. You are too young to be without a mother.

AIKO

I am terribly old.

TOORIKO

Do you require a cane?

AIKO

Do not tell Father that I am on the roadway.

TOORIKO

What have you there in your furoshiki?

AIKO

My dolls.

TOORIKO

You run away with your dolls and no food to eat?

AIKO

I am not running away!

TOORIKO

Even so, the road to town is a long one. Dolls will not keep you warm.

AIKO

Yukiko Obasan was going to burn them in the fire.

TOORIKO

You are exaggerating. Come back to the house with me. I will protect your dolls.

AIKO

Why?

TOORIKO

Because I must. Come, little bean of mine.

AIKO

Maybe she will even burn me in the fire if she thinks I am no longer of any good use.

TOORIKO

(Softening.)

Little sister. I understand. Perhaps we should hide the dolls in a special place.

AIKO

She would find them. She has explored every nook and cranny of our home in just a few days. She wants to do the same with us: clean us out, dust us off, and try to make us hers.

TOORIKO

Come. Together we will find a place for your dolls.

AIKO

You would break a rule for me?

TOORIKO

Today I will.

AIKO

Why today?

TOORIKO

Because my husband will come for me in the morning and I will return to my home.

AIKO

I see.

TOORIKO

Come, little sister. Let us carry out our family task.

AIKO

She will never let me keep them.

TOORIKO

We shall tell her that we must save them for your daughters.

AIKO

My daughters!

TOORIKO

One day you will have daughters.

AIKO

No, I will have sons, so they need never worry about being good ladies.

TOORIKO

But sons must worry about being men.

AIKO

Human beings are not designed very well.

TOORIKO

But we are. When you become a lady, you will wonder why it took so long.

AIKO

Who wants horses and typhoons?

TOORIKO

You will see. Come.

AIKO

You go on back to the house. I will come shortly. I want to see if it will snow.

TOORIKO

It has not snowed since our mother passed.

AIKO

Since she *went away.*

(A beat.)

The snow will come again.

TOORIKO

Very well. I cannot stand the cold.

AIKO

It is warm. Bury your feet in the snow and it feels like a blanket.

TOORIKO

(A smile.)

Dreamer child.

(Tooriko exits, patting Aiko on the head. Aiko cries. She unwraps her dolls and kisses them. She takes out her mirror and stares at it.)

AIKO

Mother? Where are you? Can you hear me? Your flower grows and there is fear.

(She smiles at the reflection as wind chimes tinkle and the woman's laughter is heard. Aiko looks around as if trying to find the voice. She puts everything away and runs about in a hurry.)

AIKO

Mother? Okaasan? Is that you?

(Aiko stumbles and falls. The Kuro-ko goes to her side and holds her. Lights black out.)

Scene 4

SCENE FOUR

Immediate lights up. There is a scrim that represents Aiko's lacquered mirror. Images of Aiko appear on the scrim. Aiko is on the ground and being held by the Kuro-ko. She looks up and stares at the scrim "mirror." She tries to run towards it but cannot, as if there is an invisible force in her way. Wind chimes tinkle and the laughter is heard again.

AIKO

Okaasan? I know it is you! I knew you would not abandon your promises. Okaasan!

(Aiko tries to approach the scrim again, but this time is yanked back by the invisible force. She begins to dance as if being pulled by this force. Kuro-ko and Tooriko, wearing a mask, join Aiko in her dance. Classic shakuhachi music fades in. She falls beside the mirror and is surrounded by red chiffon scarves(these can be pulled from the handle of the mirror).The stream of scarves is endless and overwhelms her. The invisible force pulls her in frenzy as she begins to dance again. The scarves are a part of a red chiffon kimono which she puts on during the dance. The scarves trail on the floor and are long enough to billow. The dance comes to a pitch and Aiko collapses on the floor. The music ceases. Aiko whimpers and moans. She is so exhausted that she cannot lift her head. Then the wind chimesbegin to tinkle again. Exit Tooriko. The Kuro-ko pushes Aiko towards the scrim and resumes the waki position. The scrim is backlit and the images of Aiko disappear. Behind the scrim appear three figures. They run in giggling and shuffling, like children at play. They are representations of kokeshi dolls. They wear masks and headgear that reflect the wooden texture and painted markings of the dolls. Their simple kimono are in the same style as their masks. They have butterfly wings on their backs. They are innocent and curious. Their tone is staccato, rhythmic. They speak in high register, with upward inflection. They stare at Aiko's figure through the scrim.)

KOKESHI

What is it?

FIRST KOKESHI

It is a doll.

SECOND AND THIRD KOKESHI

What a beautiful doll. Let us invite it to play with us.

(Through a split in the scrim, the kokeshi hesitantly approach Aiko. They touch and sniff her. One pulls a long chain of lilies out of her kimono sleeve and tickles Aiko's nose with it. One pokes at her.)

SECOND KOKESHI

Hello, little doll!

AIKO

(Weakly.)

Have you seen my mother?

(The kokeshi jump and gasp.)

THIRD KOKESHI

Why it is not a doll at all!

FIRST KOKESHI

It certainly is not one of us.

(Touches Aiko's forehead.)

THIRD KOKESHI

(Uses a special power to make this discovery.)

It...is a little girl.

SECOND KOKESHI

How lovely! We need a little girl to play with!

FIRST KOKESHI

I do not remember girls.

THIRD KOKESHI

Remember soft and sweet, pink hearts, ticklish feet.

SECOND KOKESHI

Remember from the fairy tales, the little girls with far to go.

FIRST KOKESHI

Oh yes! I remember!

(The second and third kokeshi want to take Aiko into their world.)

FIRST KOKESHI

But wait. I think she is hurt.

KOKESHI

We will have to take her home with us. We will have to make her our own.

THIRD KOKESHI

What is your name, little girl?

(The kokeshi surround Aiko with the chain of lilies. They hold her like a baby, and fan and caress her.)

THIRD KOKESHI

(As if in a trance with her special powers.)

She is Aiko. She wants to be here with us.

SECOND KOKESHI

But she asked for "mother." Who is "mother?"

THIRD KOKESHI

We will ask the Grand Mistress of Matsuyama.

SECOND KOKESHI

Oh no. We must play first.

FIRST KOKESHI

She cannot play. She is hurt.

(They all sniff her again.)

THIRD KOKESHI

But we can make her well.

FIRST KOKESHI

But she is not a kokeshi doll. Maybe she is not meant to enter the mirror.

SECOND KOKESHI

You always want to make the rules for our play. I say we should take her home.

THIRD KOKESHI

I have never had a girl toy before.

(Aiko sneezes and the kokeshi run for the scrim. They stand just inside and stare at her. She struggles to raise her head and sees them.)

AIKO

Please help me.

KOKESHI

Are you going to blow up?

AIKO

I simply sneezed.

KOKESHI

Sneezed!

(They giggle.)

You are a good girl toy.

AIKO

I need to find my mother.

KOKESHI

Mother? What is "mother?"

AIKO

(Startled.)

Wait a minute. I know you.

KOKESHI

Oh no, never-never-no.

AIKO

Yes! You are my dolls!

KOKESHI

(Laughter.)

We do not belong to you! We belong to spring!

AIKO

(Confused.)

Do you not remember? I saved you from my wicked aunt Yukiko just yesterday.

FIRST KOKESHI

What is "yesterday?"

AIKO

The day before today.

SECOND KOKESHI

What is "today?"

AIKO

It is time.

THIRD KOKESHI

What is time?

AIKO

Minutes and hours that tell you when to eat, sleep, when to stop playing —

FIRST KOKESHI

Stop playing?!

KOKESHI

What?!

FIRST KOKESHI

How absurd!

SECOND KOKESHI

Utterly boring!

THIRD KOKESHI

There is no time here.

KOKESHI

Let us play! You are one of us now!

(The kokeshi giggle like human wind chimes. Aiko begins crawling to the scrim. Finally, she reaches it. The kokeshi look at one another and finally decide to drag her in. The minute she enters their world, Aiko is renewed. The kokeshi are delighted. They remove her red kimono and cast it outside the scrim. The Japanese

children's song, "Haru Ga Kita," fades in (an instrumental version). They begin playing with great delight, using the lily chain as a toy. They dance and skip. Outside the scrim, Otoosan enters and sees the red kimono. It startles him. He picks up the mirror and looks around in panic.)

OTOOSAN

Aiko-chan? Aiko!

(He touches the red kimono and raises his fingers to his nose to smell them. He licks his fingers to taste. His panic heightens.)

OTOOSAN

Aiko!

(He runs out. Aiko suddenly looks in his direction. She goes to the edge of the scrim and the kokeshi pull her back.)

KOKESHI

Where are you going? Do not leave us.

AIKO

It is time for dinner. I must put you away.

KOKESHI

We need never be put away again. We play forever.

AIKO

But surely you must stop to eat and sleep?

KOKESHI

Oh no. We are never hungry.

AIKO

But you must have reading and writing lessons with your tutor.

KOKESHI

Oh no. Never-never-no.

AIKO

What about your sewing? Are your stitches perfect?

KOKESHI

Perfect life. No curse. Never nervous.

AIKO

But sometimes you have to follow rules, do you not?

KOKESHI

We know everything that a doll must know to be happy. Do you know everything that a little girl must know to be happy?

AIKO

(Sadly.)

No.

KOKESHI

Then you need a teacher.

FIRST KOKESHI

Perhaps the Grand Mistress?

SECOND KOKESHI

Oh, but we are having so much fun at play. Can it not wait?

AIKO

I want to find my mother. I have something very important to tell her.

SECOND KOKESHI

What could be more important than playing?

AIKO

Something is happening to me that only my mother can explain.

THIRD KOKESHI

Remember, she is from a different world. Things happen to little girls.

FIRST & SECOND KOKESHI

Oh dear!

FIRST KOKESHI

Are you dying? In fairy tales, human beings die.

SECOND KOKESHI

Are you lost in the woods?

THIRD KOKESHI

Did you tell a lie?

KOKESHI

Lying is bad.

AIKO

I have run away from home.

KOKESHI

(Gasp.)

Why?

AIKO

Because my aunt has stolen my father.

KOKESHI

Ummm. Stealing is very bad.

AIKO

She loves him and —

KOKESHI

Oh! Love is very, very good!

AIKO

But the worst of it is I have been cursed.

(Kokeshi gasp in unison.)

FIRST KOKESHI

Is it catching?

AIKO

No. You are dolls. You are safe from this condition.

SECOND KOKESHI

Condition?

AIKO

Of course, some say it is power.

FIRST KOKESHI

Like magic?!

AIKO

I am not certain, but something tells me that I do not want it in my life.

SECOND KOKESHI

Why not?

AIKO

Because it will make me bleed.

THIRD KOKESHI

Ah. I know what it is.

FIRST & SECOND KOKESHI

What is it? What is it?

THIRD KOKESHI

It is the most interesting things about little girls.

SECOND KOKESHI

Uh-oh! What have you done?

AIKO

I have done nothing wrong!

THIRD KOKESHI

It is not something that you *do.* It just happens.

FIRST KOKESHI

What is it? Does she have an illness?

THIRD KOKESHI

Little girls...grow up.

AIKO

I am afraid that is what is happening to me.

KOKESHI

We are sorry. So sorry.

(Aiko points outside of the scrim to the red kimono.)

AIKO

I have been bleeding inside.

SECOND KOKESHI

What is bleeding?

AIKO

When your insides start to come out.

THIRD KOKESHI

And your body changes.

FIRST & SECOND KOKESHI

Oh my.

FIRST KOKESHI

It sounds like death.

AIKO

It is meant to be a sign of life.

THIRD KOKESHI

That is the power!

SECOND KOKESHI

But you are not bleeding now.

AIKO

(Startled.)

That is true! The bleeding has stopped.

FIRST KOKESHI

So you must stay. You are safe here.

SECOND KOKESHI

No horses!

THIRD KOKESHI

No typhoons!

FIRST KOKESHI

Nothing will stop you from playing.

THIRD KOKESHI

We will take you to see the Grand Mistress.

AIKO

I will agree to your desires if you promise to help me find my mother. Is she here? Has she been here? I heard her laughter.

(The kokeshi giggle and pull Aiko in different directions as "Haru Ga Kita" fades up again. Upstage, from behind the scrim, a figure in a long, exaggerated kimono decorated with lilies appears. It is the spirit of Okaasan. A shroud of lilies is over her head. She walks slowly, formally. The kokeshi and Aiko do not notice her. Finally, she encircles the play group and they stop. The kokeshi fall to their knees in bows. Aiko is in awe and then recognition sets in.)

AIKO

Okaasan?

KOKESHI

Honorable Respectable Sincere Loving Sensitive Creative Kind Beautiful Grand Mistress of Matsuyama!

AIKO

No, this is my mother.

KOKESHI

Shhhh!

AIKO

And you are my dolls.

KOKESHI

Quiet!

AIKO

I fell in the snow and I looked in the mirror and...

(To Grand Mistress.)

Are you my mother?

OKAASAN

I am all mothers.

AIKO

Will you be mine today?

OKAASAN

Are you a flower?

AIKO

Yes.

OKAASAN

Then I know I can help you because I am also a flower.

KOKESHI

Tulips! Daisies! Chrysanthemums! Lilies!

AIKO

Mother, I —

OKAASAN

Yes.

AIKO

I am bleeding.

OKAASAN

Ah...

KOKESHI

Poor little girl.

OKAASAN

Oh no. We must offer congratulations.

AIKO

Congratulations?

OKAASAN

Yes. You are becoming powerful.

KOKESHI

Ohhhh!

OKAASAN

Can you not feel it?

AIKO

(Confused.)

No.

OKAASAN

Aiko-chan, it is dinner time and you are here playing. Forever playing. Is that what you desire?

AIKO

Father has married Yukiko Obasan and she sleeps in your bed and snoops all over the house.

OKAASAN

Father needs a wife and you need a mother.

(Aiko wants to reach out to the Grand Mistress, but cannot touch her, as if there is an invisible wall between them. They reach their finger tips towards one another.)

AIKO

I intended to go home for dinner, but my dolls want to play and play.

KOKESHI

Jump and roll and skip and leap!

OKAASAN

Then, at some point, you must make a decision.

AIKO

I came looking for you, Okaasan, because of the curse.

OKAASAN

Is it a curse?

AIKO

Yes! Horses and typhoons!

OKAASAN

But it endows us as well, with richness, fruitfulness, boys and girls.

KOKESHI

Make us one little, two little, three little girls!

AIKO

I cannot forget horses and typhoons.

OKAASAN

Are you bleeding now?

KOKESHI

Nooooo.

OKAASAN

In a world like this, there is no blood or death. Just light.

KOKESHI

Sunbeams, moonbeams, starry bright!

AIKO

You said it was unlikely that I could avoid bleeding.

OKAASAN

Little dolls cannot bleed. Stay here and roll in the clouds all your life long, Aiko. You need never look into a human face again.

AIKO

But I am not a doll!

OKAASAN

Are you certain?

KOKESHI

She smells like a girl!

AIKO

These are the dolls. My silly kokeshi.

OKAASAN

Then, dear one, shall you return home for dinner and sit at the table as an adult with your father and aunt...your new mother?

AIKO

New mother? I only have *one* mother.

OKAASAN

Never turn away from love, my child.

(A beat.)

Shall you go home now?

KOKESHI

Oh no! Do not go!

OKAASAN

Or do you choose to be a doll and play forever?

KOKESHI

Oh yes! Come, Aiko the adventuress!

AIKO

But I do not like your sister.

OKAASAN

She is not the only thing you must accept. There is Otoosan. He is different now, trying to find his way in a world that excludes me. Tooriko-san also struggles with the unevenness of a new life.

AIKO

You mean she is not happy?

OKAASAN

She is *learning.* That means some days are pink and others grey.

(A beat.)

Then there are all the rules.

KOKESHI

Despicable!

OKAASAN

But, without order, life is like an unkept house.

AIKO

But Yukiko Obasan wants to take away my dolls.

OKAASAN

She knows that your body is speaking new languages. She wants to help you learn them.

AIKO

She wants me to wear my hair "like a lady!"

(The kokeshi begin to giggle and tug at Aiko.)

AIKO

Tell them to stop playing, Okaasan.

OKAASAN

But that is what they are created to do. What of you, my young lady? What is it that you are meant to be and do?

KOKESHI

Come play with us, little girl.

AIKO

Stop it, you silly dolls.

KOKESHI

Silly is good! Silly, willy, shrilly, frilly!

OKAASAN

Say the word and I shall close the doors to that other world.

(Aiko looks toward the opening of the scrim. Outside the scrim, the Kurokoscatters crimson petals around the stage and dances with the red chiffon scarved kimono as if beckoning her.)

AIKO

But if I go back, will you come with me, Okaasan?

OKAASAN

I cannot.

AIKO

Will you always be in the mirror?

OKAASAN

I will grow young with you.

AIKO

But every time I look into it, you will be there?

OKAASAN

All your life you will look in the mirror and be reminded of your mother.

AIKO

(Sadly.)

But it will not really be you, will it?

OKAASAN

That is a difficult question.

(A beat.)

It will be you. And it will be your mother in you. It will be what she was and what you both can be in another time.

AIKO

Dolls are so lucky.

OKAASAN

Are they? They shall never breathe, never make a memory that allows them to live forever.

AIKO

A flower.

OKAASAN

Yes. A flower.

(Aiko steps towards the scrim and the kokeshi frown sadly.)

KOKESHI

Oh no.

FIRST KOKESHI

Do not leave us.

SECOND KOKESHI

Do not go away to that place!

THIRD KOKESHI

They will change you, rearrange you!

AIKO

It is time for dinner.

KOKESHI

(A friendly warning.)

But the bleeding will return!

AIKO

Yes. Like a river.

THIRD KOKESHI

Horses!

FIRST & SECOND KOKESHI

Typhoon!

AIKO

Silly kokeshi. Sweet things. Today I must go to my aunt who knows a language that I must learn.

FIRST KOKESHI

But it will hurt so much to grow up.

AIKO

Perhaps.

SECOND KOKESHI

Do not let her burn us up in the fire!

AIKO

I shall protect you with my dying breath.

THIRD KOKESHI

Do not forget about us!

AIKO

Do not forget about me when I am no longer a little girl.

(Bowing to her mother.)

Sayoonara, Okaasan.

OKAASAN

Endure, persevere, ne, Aiko-san.

KOKESHI

Carry on!

AIKO

You really should rest, dear dolls.

KOKESHI

Oh no! We cannot sleep! Too much fun to reap! We will think of you and try not to be blue!

AIKO

Goodbye!

KOKESHI

Let us play, let us play, let us play!

(Aiko steps through the scrim and immediately, back lights fade on the scrim. Shakuhachi music fades in. Aiko grows weak and loses her balance. The Kuro-ko aids her. She falls and crawls toward the red kimono and crimson petals. Music ceases. With determination Aiko pulls herself to standing, politely refusing the help of the Kuro-ko who bows to her honorably. As Aiko exits, the Kuro-ko assumes the waki position. Lights crossfade to Scene Five...)

Scene 5

SCENE FIVE

Lights up downstage center. Otoosan and Yukiko Obasan kneel at a low table eating a meal. Yukiko Obasan eats ravenously. She is visibly with child. She is exhausted and her attitude is considerably more humble. Aiko enters.

AIKO

Otoosan?

(Otoosan drops his food in shock. Yukiko Obasan faints.)

OTOOSAN

Anta. Aiko!

AIKO

Hello, Father.

OTOOSAN

Aiko...

AIKO

Is she all right?

OTOOSAN

(Not looking in Yukiko's direction.)

Yes, yes.

(Then looks at her and immediately holds her in his arms and fans her.)

No, I mean —

(Stops and looks at Aiko with incredulity.)

I... I thought you were dead.

AIKO

I am very alive. Did you look for me all night?

OTOOSAN

All night? Aiko-chan, you have been gone for two winters!

AIKO

(Surprised.)

Two winters?

(She stares at Obasan's stomach.)

I see.

OTOOSAN

That night, I saw blood in the snow. I had given you up for dead, but we could not find your body. Your aunt looked for you tirelessly. Where have you been?

(Yukiko moans.)

OTOOSAN

Anta. Wake up, wake up.

(Aiko stares at her aunt.)

AIKO

She felt it important to find me? But she is with child now, a new child, a little girl for you, for this house.

OTOOSAN

She cried for you, Aiko-chan.

AIKO

For me?

OTOOSAN

Yes. She felt that she had failed you.

(Aiko stares at her father's hand which clasps her aunt's hand tightly. Aiko unwraps her furoshiki to reveal the red petals and materials. Otoosan is shocked.)

AIKO

I have been bleeding.

OTOOSAN

Has someone hurt you?

AIKO

Whoever makes girls into women. But I have come home to learn.

(Otoosan does not comprehend at first. Yukiko Obasan sputters awake and stares wide-eyed at Aiko. She kowtows to Aiko.)

YUKIKO OBASAN

You are a ghost returned from the dead! What can I offer you, most honorable spirit?

(Aiko touches her aunt's hand with affection, but Yukiko jumps.)

AIKO

I am sorry, dear aunt.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Honorable Spirit, may I feed you fruit and tea?

AIKO

It is Aiko, just Aiko. Touch me, aunt.

YUKIKO OBASAN

No, no.

OTOOSAN

It is all right. She has returned. She was lost.

YUKIKO OBASAN

Aiko? Is it truly you?

AIKO

Yes, Obasan.

YUKIKO OBASAN

I was afraid you died out in the cold, all because of what I wanted to do with your dolls. What has happened to you? Have you been hurt?

AIKO

I have become a woman, Obasan.

YUKIKO OBASAN

My dear child, dear young woman.

(Aiko sits beside her aunt.)

AIKO

Will it always hurt?

YUKIKO OBASAN

Maybe, maybe not. But you must think of it as a clean pain.

AIKO

Clean?

YUKIKO OBASAN

It is never dirty. It is never unkind. It is a river of life.

(Pats her stomach.)

It flowed in me and now a child will be born. It will be a girl. I can hear her sing at night when the moon glows.

AIKO

Here. Then you must have these.

(Gives her the furoshiki.)

You may take my dolls now.

YUKIKO OBASAN

No. Please keep them.

AIKO

Are you sure?

YUKIKO OBASAN

They are a part of you, and of your mother.

AIKO

If you truly do not mind, I would like to keep them. Maybe you will allow your new child to be my little sister and I will hand these down to her.

YUKIKO OBASAN

How kind of you.

AIKO

As for you father, you must no longer be silent.

OTOOSAN

Aiko!

AIKO

You must tell us your secrets.

OTOOSAN

It is not the custom.

AIKO

But I need to hear you, Otoosan.

YUKIKO OBASAN

He will be with me when the child is born.

AIKO

Is that true?

OTOOSAN

(Embarrassed.)

I have asked for permission.

AIKO

My little sister...she will need to have beautiful dolls to play with. And when she becomes a young woman, I will hold her in my arms and sing songs to her.

YUKIKO OBASAN

We will polish the dolls and keep them in view, for memories must live, be touched, tasted. Is that not so, Otoosan?

OTOOSAN

I — well —

(He's left speechless as he stares at the red petals.)

AIKO

Speak, Otoosan.

OTOOSAN

I... I see your mother in your face.

(Aiko takes out the mirror and stares into it. She hears the wind chimes and laughter. It makes her smile. It is almost as if Otoosan and Obasan hear it as well. They look around the room and then try to deny with their expression that anything is out of sorts.)

AIKO

This mirror can reflect the whole world. And, after all, that is what we see when we look at other people, at flowers, at the mountains. Reflections of the light.

(While speaking, Aiko moves downstage center. Scrim lights up; we see the Grand Mistress and kokeshi at play. Tooriko enters carrying a baby in bunting. Aiko looks around in wonder.)

AIKO

Ah...think of all the new little girls...!

(As lights fade out, the kokeshi sing "Haru Ga Kita":)

KOKESHI
Haru Ga Kita, Haru Ga Kita
Doko Ni Kita, Yama Ni Kita
Sato Ni Kita, No Ni Mo Kita
Hana Ga Saku, Hana Ga Saku
Doko Ni Saku, Yama Ni Saku
Sato Ni Saku, No Ni Mo Saku.

END OF PLAY